



## **DECISION NOTICE WOLF CREEK CONSERVATION EASEMENT**

Region 4 Headquarters  
4600 Giant Springs Rd.  
Great Falls, MT 59405  
(406) 454-5840

### **DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVE CONSIDERED:**

#### Proposed Action

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP) is proposing to purchase and manage a conservation easement (CE) on Pheasants Forever's Wolf Creek property outside of Denton. This proposed CE, called the "Wolf Creek Conservation Easement," will protect and conserve in perpetuity ~ 1,000 deeded acres mixed sagebrush-grassland habitat adjoining the Beckman Wildlife Management Area.

This CE will also guarantee free public access for hunting and other recreational pursuits on these deeded CE lands, satisfying MFWP's objectives in providing access and recreational opportunities to the public.

#### No Action

For the No Action Alternative, MFWP would not purchase a CE on the Wolf Creek property. Pheasants Forever would continue to manage the property for upland game birds in the interim, but there would be no guarantee of permanent conservation and public access on the Land, especially if the property were to be sold. Additionally, the opportunity for Pheasants Forever to leverage funds for other habitat projects in the area to benefit wildlife and the public would have to come by other means.

### **MONTANA ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT PUBLIC PROCESS:**

MFWP is required by the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) to assess potential impacts of its proposed actions to the human and physical environments, evaluate those impacts through an interdisciplinary approach, including public input, and make a decision based on this information. MFWP released a draft Environmental Assessment (EA) for public review of the proposed action on August 21, 2020 and accepted public comment until 5:00 P. M. on September 20, 2020.

Notice of the proposal and availability of the Draft EA was published in the *Lewistown News Argus* and the *Great Falls Tribune*. Copies of the EA were distributed to Fergus County Commissioners, neighboring landowners, interested individuals, groups, and agencies to ensure their knowledge of the proposed project. The EA was also available for public review on MFWP's web site (<http://fwp.mt.gov/>, "Recent Public Notices" and "Environmental Assessments") for the duration of the comment period. MFWP also issued a News Release.

**SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENT:**

FWP received 10 total written comments via email. A breakdown of the comments is as follows: 10 were in support of the proposed action (purchase of the conservation easement), 0 supported the No Action Alternative, and 0 did not specify.

In their support, comments referenced the benefits of expanded perpetual public access adjacent to the Beckman WMA, the protection of the Land's Conservation Values, and maintaining the lands in private ownership.

**RESPONSE TO COMMENTS:**

No comments received elicited a response; all comments were statements of support

**DECISION:**

In reviewing all the public comment, evaluating the environmental effects, and other relevant information, I recommend that MFWP pursue the completion of the Wolf Creek Conservation Easement Project and recommend that the Fish & Wildlife Commission approve the proposed action as well.

Through the MEPA process, MFWP found no significant impacts on the human or physical environments associated with this proposal. Therefore, the EA is the appropriate level of analysis, and an environmental impact statement is not required.

After review of this proposal, it is my decision to accept the draft EA as supplemented by this Decision Notice and the summary/response to public comment contained herein. In combination, these documents constitute the Final EA. MFWP believes the completion of this project is in the best interests of working agricultural landscapes, fish and wildlife, and public recreation.

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Gary Bertellotti  
Region 4 Fish and Wildlife Supervisor

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Date